

FROM: Rex T. Westerfield
Regional Manager - Public Relations
THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY
2711 McKinney Avenue, Suite B
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 29, 1966

In light of an individual making a television statement that The John Birch Society planned to picket the union convention in Harlingen last Sunday, and in light of various press inquiries, we feel it necessary to make a statement pertaining to the National Farm Worker's Association (NFWA) "strike" in the Texas Valley.

The Rio Grande City "strike" follows a pattern that has been utilized in other parts of our country and certainly is the exact pattern of the "grape strike" in Delano, California. The NFWA does not appear to be a legitimate recognized union actually working to improve wages and working conditions for the workers. In Delano, the NFWA, led by Cesar Chavez, attempted to get the workers to strike and the wages they were demanding were less than the wages most of the workers were already making. They imported agitators, rabal-rousers and revolutionaries into Delano which did nothing but create confusion, and enmity between the workers and the growers.

(more)

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 Natl. Guard Armory - Brownsville
 Sun. - 1 PM
 July 10th

#2
 14th
 March
 to Sun Jan
 people in cars to dance
 17th

FROM: Ben T. Westfield
 Regional Manager - Public Relations
 THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY
 2711 McKinney Avenue, Suite B
 Dallas, Texas 75204 (214) TA 7 7822

In light of an individual making a television statement that the John Birch Society planned to picket the union convention in Harlingen, Texas, and in light of various press inquiries, we feel it necessary to make a statement pertaining to the National Farm Worker's Association (NFWA) strike in the Texas Valley. The El Paso Grande City strike follows a pattern that has been utilized in other parts of our country and certainly is the exact pattern of the "grape strike" in Delano, California. The NFWA does not appear to be a legitimate recognized union actually working to improve wages and working conditions for the workers. In Delano, the NFWA, led by Cesar Chavez, attempted to get the workers to strike and the wages they were demanding were less than the wages most of the workers were already making. They imported agitators, radical reporters and revolutionaries into Delano which did nothing but create confusion, and enmity between the workers and the growers.

Here, in Texas, these imported, self proclaimed revolutionaries, Dolores Huerta, Eugene Nelson, and other graduates of the Sol Alinsky "school" seem to have created a problem for themselves. The workers don't want to strike - - instead they are staying in the fields and working. We have a strike without workers - - with "outsiders" demanding lower, not higher pay. We hear slogans right out of a dozen Communist revolutionary organizations. The strikers are all generals - - there is no army.

Members of The John Birch Society have been diligently working to create understanding and harmony between the workers and the growers and between the Latin Americans and the North Americans. This work has been done by word of mouth and by the printed word. The principal document that has been circulated is a reprint of an article from the June issue of American Opinion magazine entitled "The Grapes". This article was circulated to law enforcement officers, the press and others so that it could be easily seen who was directing the "strike". Our members well remember the words of George Washington, "Truth will ultimately prevail where there is pains taken to bring it to light" and the words of our founder, Robert Welch, "Education is our total strategy, truth is our only weapon". All efforts extended by members of The John Birch Society, under direction of the Society, are always with dignity. Our members do not involve themselves in picketing, demonstrating, sit-in's, stand-in's - - and all the other "in's" that are so far out.

(more)

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In answer to questions pertaining to statements and actions by the various priests and members of the Catholic Church, we simply state that we have no more business interfering in the activities of the Catholic Church than does one priest from one diocese have in interfering in labor disputes in another diocese.

We commend the law enforcement officers, including all local police and the Texas Rangers for their very effective protection of the citizens both their lives and their property and for the maintaining of law and order at all times.

(30)

211 Nolan Street
San Antonio, Texas 78202
August 3, 1966

Mr. Rex T. Westerfield
Regional Manager - Public Relations
The John Birch Society
2711 McKinney Avenue, Suite B
Dallas, Texas 75204

Dear Mr. Westerfield:

After reading your press release of July 18 I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Since your earlier release (June 29) and press conference in Harlingen I have been brooding over what you said. The July 18 pronouncement triggered what follows. All of it has been on my mind for some time and now I've got to get it off my chest.

Perhaps the foolishness of some of your statements can be excused by your superficial knowledge of the issues involved in the California and Texas "huelgas," but that kind of knowledge is almost unpardonable in such a serious matter. If, by chance, you speak from deep knowledge of the economic and social conditions in the valleys and of the economic history of our country--if your knowledge goes beyond Gary Allen's "Grapes"--then the mischief of much of what you say is even more serious.

You say the National Farm Workers' Association is not a "legitimate recognized union." So what? By whom or what must they be "recognized"? Surely they don't need any stamp of approval from you--or me--or even the AFL-CIO (although that federation will probably charter the newly merged NFWA-AWOC later this month.) I suggest that, even if they shouldn't get chartered, it's enough that they recognize themselves, that they be what, in fact, they are at the moment: an independent association of farm workers who have exercised their American freedom to build something for themselves--and quite successfully, at that.

You're always preaching "individual responsibility." They've used their intelligence to know they can't do anything sepa-

rately and their personal choice to raise a collective voice. This represents an independence of spirit you ought to be proud of. The NFWA has done this with no help from the government; you ought to be hailing their action!

In a television interview in the valley you seemed to allow that if a "legitimate" union were involved you would be more sympathetic. I don't believe you--not because I feel you'd lie, but because I think you are unsympathetic to the union principle, if not actually unable to understand it. Indeed, I think you'd feel as you do now even if the Office Workers' Union sent nice, neat, scrubbed Anglo-American secretary-types to take memberships among farm workers!

At any rate, it's clear that you don't "recognize" the NFWA, but I suggest that you do not, or cannot, even grasp the true nature of the movement. Read what one observer has written about it: "Cesar Chavez was convinced that this movement had to come from the sentiments, intelligence and resolution of the community, without the benefit of national unions, their organizers and their funds. Moreover, each decision had to be participated in by the membership. The men have not committed themselves to a technique of power, for a clearly defined pragmatic goal. They have committed themselves to a way of life, to a sense of personal dignity, restraint and trust in one another and the organism of free societies. There is a humanism here which exceeds anything found in the literature of the 'thirties, a sense of community which is different from mere comradeship, a conviction that growers and workers alike are organically related and not merely separate centers of power to be brought into balance. If this is liberalism, it is liberalism in a more human and more Christian dimension. If it is democracy, it is more 'participatory' than bureaucratic or structural."

I realize that words like "comradeship," "liberalism" and "democracy" may be traumatic for you, but for most of the rest of us they represent noble--and American--aspirations: "brotherhood"--especially in one's work, "freedom"--to mature into a man, and "belonging"--to something more than a packing shed. You are a man who cannot see the forest for the trees; in this, you cannot see the movement for the men, the true revolution for the "revolutionaries," as you call us. You personify the fatal weakness of negativism: you don't see what's there; you only look for what's not there.

There is a certain ironic truth to your statement that the NFWA is not a "recognized union"; the growers in the valley do not acknowledge them. This is the heart of the matter; perhaps the word, "recognize," is the key to the whole bit: acceptance, in the first place, of the organization the campesinos have formed, but more importantly, recognition of their right to organize and to bargain, to have a voice in their work life. But even more profoundly, it is a recognition of the workers as persons, which amounts to what Negroes have been achieving in their civil rights struggle: "somebodiness," to use Dr. Martin Luther King's word.

"Human dignity" is a common phrase these days, but it describes a reality that's still uncommon for so many. It's a modern paradox that only through a collective effort can the dispossessed and unskilled protest--and protect--their individuality. Even the sophisticated need collective action in our complicated society; the untalented are simply helpless without it. In this real world it's the only way left to them to make their presence felt and their person respected. This is not the collectivity of communism but of American realism.

Growers don't acknowledge the union because they don't recognize their workers as individuals, as persons, but as "children." The growers are not so much "guilty" of as they are "afflicted" with an almost incurable paternalism. This is as much a root of the problem--if not the root--as dollars and cents. Like so many employers here in south Texas the growers simply cannot imagine themselves having to deal with campesinos on any basis of bargaining equality. It is not so much a matter of a union--of this or that union--as it is of union, as such. Yet unionism remains the only significant solution to their mutual plight. One expert puts it this way: "The complicated economic problems of the Rio Grande Valley will never be solved until both the workers and the growers are organized. Organized cooperation between the two groups is their only hope."

The workers' drive is for identity; not the communistic facelessness you fear and charge but rather the individual identity of this man, this woman--who are dignified by union, as such, and by contract and justice; by "status," in a word. People who cannot understand this do not see faces, but only "hands" and backs. Only people like them can say there is no labor problem in the Texas valley. Only "slave holders" can talk that way; after all, a master does not expect any trouble

from his "hands." The racial agony we suffer in the U.S. is rooted in the facelessness that slavery bred in the Negro. The Mexican-American has never been a slave, but he might just as well have been for all the "recognition" he currently enjoys.

The denial of such recognition on the part of people like you is a special brand of blindness and leads, on a more superficial level, to such nonsense as your statement that "lower, not higher pay" is being demanded of the growers. By what calculation--perhaps of the New Math?--is \$1.25 less than 85 cents (in Texas) and \$1.75 less than \$1.40 (in California)? But even this demand goes beyond dollars and cents. Important as money is, it's the stability of the pay, its guarantee and the guarantee of work that are sought through unionization. Such security as the union shop and union hiring hall have already been won at Schenley in California.

The gains at Schenley should put your superficiality to rout. This, I think, is the root of your difficulty. You need to know more. If, as your founder, Robert Welch, has taught you, "Education is (your) total strategy," then I suggest total education should be your tactic.

You take credit for "diligently working to create understanding and harmony between the workers and the growers." But the "harmony" you seek is only the status quo; you prefer the calm "order" of injustice to the clamor and discomfort of correcting it. Harmony is the last thing needed where injustice exists! It is blasphemous to suggest that those who suffer should be satisfied; the harmony you offer is at the expense of the exploited. It is blasphemous to worship the false gods of paternalism and peonage; they must be toppled.

The "huelga" has uncovered, for all to see, the disharmony existing between growers and campesinos; the disharmony in a system that keeps workers at the mercy of grower individualism, "green-card" competition and the unmitigated harshness of a law of surplus supply and dog-eat-dog demand. It has turned a brighter light on an agricultural system that is itself in revolution as more and more marginal producers find it harder to hang on to the edge; it has ruffled an incredible indifference not only on the part of growers but also of legislators; and it has proved how unscrupulous was the bracero program which kept domestic farm workers gasping for economic breath among the waves of Mexican nationals which flowed north to

satisfy grower greed and finally shamed public apathy. (It is noteworthy, I think, that significant organizing in California and a sustained strike came only after repeal of Public Law 78.) Any "harmony" is phony that doesn't acknowledge all of this and deal realistically with it.

Of course it's a revolution! And thank God for it. The oppressed have finally found their voice and enough ears to hear it. Their cry is "huelga"! But it wells up out of thousands of American throats and not out of a "dozen Communist revolutionary organizations," as you suggest. And when priests shout, "Que viva la huelga," we don't find it in a communist textbook; it comes from our minds and hearts. It's in our minds because we understand what the strike is and are satisfied it is just. The cry rises to our lips from our hearts, too: as an act of love, to help the campesinos help themselves to get up off their knees (a man can pray just as well standing up!); it's an act of reparation, that Americans who are least able to, have to bear the added burden of teaching others some lessons in Americanism, of reminding the "other America" that the Lord intended the earth and its fullness for all men.

"Huelga" is a cry of sorrow (today's "grito de dolores") for the campesinos who now have to add to their economic oppression the verbal abuse of your words, innuendoes and insinuations, and to suffer, along with the growers' disregard, your lack of compassion. The cry comes from our gut, too, as we try to draw from the people some of their resolve and to give back some of our own stamina for the long haul, because there will be no quick and easy justice as they face a paternalism and a kind of "know-nothingism" from you as well as from the growers.

I'm not sure what kind of "understanding" you claim to be "creating." There is no evidence you know the condition of agriculture in the valley. But perhaps you can be excused because you are so far removed, geographically. I watched one valley priest cry crocodile tears as he listed the hardships the farmers have to endure. He called them the most virtuous people in the world, but said nothing about the campesinos--and could not explain how wage justice might fit under one or other of the virtues. The poor must bear the burden of our ignorance, to boot!

The only kind of "understanding" that will be finally significant is that reached across the bargaining table. Anything less is ignorance. "Understanding" is not one-sided; it takes both growers and workers to bargain. Schenley now understands; the Christian Brothers do, too. (Anyone who can call the Delano effort a "fiasco," as you do, has got to be short on understanding.) DiGiorgio will someday see the light. And so will the growers in Texas' Magic Valley.

While you've been "diligently working to create understanding," the valley strikers have been diligently walking to do the same. They would agree with your quote from George Washington (who could disagree with him!): "Truth will ultimately prevail where there is pains taken to bring it to light." (Even communists would buy that.) The strikers are trying to bring the truth of their plight "to light." Would that the brightness of the Texas sun were enough, but it's another brightness they're seeking: the light in men's minds to understand their struggle and--as important--to support it. The strikers have their own way of "taking pains," literally speaking! They're marching. They don't pretend their march is a solution, but only a finger pointing to a problem needing a solution.

Probably there is no other way than to demonstrate publicly, and I suggest there is at least as much dignity, by reason of purpose and determination, in the strikers' way as in yours. If there is any lack of dignity it's on the part of those who deny them due dignity in their work. I think it's in bad taste to look down your nose at the marchers; close examination might call it snobbery. If you had any sense of humor you'd have been out picketing yourself! More people might begin to take you seriously.

For all your sophistication you can't recognize the dignity of people caught up in a struggle. You know nothing about it when you demean others less sophisticated and articulate than you for only doing what they can do. If bending their backs for 85 cents an hour is not undignified why is marching with their backs straight? And up, too!

The strikers are simply trying to do, in their way, what earlier Americans did when they crossed mountains and rivers and valleys and plains to take hold of this land and make it their own and dig their roots deep in its soil. They cannot hope any longer to possess the land in the same manner, but they are marching in the only context they know. The crowd coming up the highway represents thousands of Mexican-American cam-

pesinos who have wandered up and down the face of this land as rootless as the dust that drifts across the plaza in Rio Grande City and that makes you feel as lonely as itself for a people who are dependent on earth that is not even theirs. The only thing that belongs to them is their sweat--and they give even that to the soil.

Their wanderings have never got them anywhere, economically, socially, politically; but their trips now are taking them somewhere: they didn't march from Delano to Sacramento, you know, but from Delano to wage and job justice; and the valley strikers are not going from Rio Grande City to Austin. They're marching from Rio Grande to recognition and dignity.

What's so undignified--or unamerican--about trying to get a toe hold in your own soil? By your criticism of the campesinos you reveal yourself as keeper of a restrictive, a "constipated" kind of Americanism; you're "guilty" of (the wrong kind of) Americanism! The strikers march under the flag; you wrap yourself in it. You'd surely extol our native colonists and pioneers, yet you seem to reserve scorn for a later and more disadvantaged breed of American who, I'd guess, might have the same idea his forbears had: that, as they thought the English were not the proper people to be deciding things for them--owning and running their lives--so the Mexican-American campesino has come to be convinced that he knows better than the growers and people like you what's best for him.

My reaction to your statement that "the Communist party is openly supporting the . . . strike in the Texas Rio Grande Valley" is no different from what it was to your question of legitimacy of recognition: so what? Characteristically, you are obsessed with communism. I suppose America needs watchdogs which guard us against the menace, but do you have to fill the air with so much loud barking? And at that, it's not really a good, healthy bark--but more like a petulant yapping.

Are priests who participate presumed to be communists? Together we could raise the same shout--for example, "Long live the pope!" (or, "the John Birch Society")--but for different reasons. We might yell it because we really want him to live and flourish; the communists might shout it for the sake of confusing and confounding--or perhaps even with tongue-in-cheek. Though they cry it the louder and in perfect unison with us, it is not about to silence our shout, whatever the interpretation put on it by those who have ears only for the cries of communists but not for the pleas of the oppressed.

Your preoccupation with what you consider "the advantage (to) the communists" in supporting non-communist movements leads you into bad history. It is plainly not so that "always in history" such cooperation has been to their advantage. Case after case can be made "that (even) where the communist conspiracy cooperated with and supported a movement it was to the advantage of" the movement itself, and not of the communists. Many measures of the economic and social reform of U.S. capitalism have been supported by communists, but it's been capitalism, not communism, that's benefited. Capitalism, not communism, has flourished in America. The latter has encountered nothing but hostile soil and climate in our country; it hasn't even taken root. Communism has no more roots in the economic and social soil of America or in the "psychological" soil of Americans than does the Mexican-American campesino in the fields he sweats over.

Reactionaries like you are preoccupied with an "advantage (to) the communists" which, in effect, does not exist. Reasonable reformers--or "revolutionaries," to stay in your idiom--are concerned with the movement itself, in this instance, the NFWA struggle. You're fussing about fiction, we're wrestling with reality; you're off chasing shadows, we're struggling with substance; you're riding a broomstick through the sky; we're marching with our feet on the ground. I, for one, will continue to hew to the line and let the chips fall where they may. If the communists want to hew, too, that's their business--and yours.

You quote the July 10, 1966 issue of the Communist Worker describing the leaders of the valley strike as "saviours" of the workers. Far better, I say, to be a "saviour" in that sense than a "saver" of a system that requires a surplus of bodies and sweat to deliver food to our tables. Industrial capitalism was saved and modified--and flourishes today--because, among other things, labor organized and found its own voice and established its position within the capitalistic framework. The same must be done for agricultural capitalism.

Is the lesson of our economic history to be lost on us? Must we go through the same torment in agriculture that we suffered in industry? If we do, it will be because we're more dumb than evil--dumb about our own history and experience. But if we do end up passing through another ordeal, I submit it will be the fault of Anglo arrogance on the part of growers like DiGiorgio in California, of the head-in-sand obscurantism of

people like you, of the stubborn and conscienceless refusal of legislators to pass protective laws and of the excessive individualism of so many growers, especially the smaller ones, which keeps them from realizing that they, too, must organize, if for no other reason than their own survival.

The road ahead is long; it stretches far beyond Sacramento and Austin. Farm workers still face the obstacles you have put in their way: your own numbing negativism; the brutal--psychological and, in some instances, physical--opposition of many growers; the indifference of lawmakers. The latter may well be the most inhuman hindrance of all, worse even than physical violence. Men who hunger and thirst for justice have always found ways to beat back brutality or to suffer it until it wears itself out. But the inaction of legislators who are charged with concern for the common good, the good of all the people they represent, is a cruel burden to bear.

If those of you who have hindered the way to justice refuse to do what you properly can to correct the abuses of the system and of the people who "run" it, then I think the words of James 5 can be justly directed at you: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl over your miseries which will come upon you. Your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you, and will devour your flesh as fire does. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who reaped your fields, which have been kept back by you unjustly, cry out; and their cry has entered into the ears of the Lord."

You've put the monkey on the wrong back. It's got to be put squarely where it belongs: on the back, that is, on the conscience of anyone who has by commission or omission, by word or deed, aided and abetted in any way a system of cynical, arrogant and conscienceless exploitation. Such exploitation should make America--in the deepest theological and moral and human way--ashamed of herself.

It will not be enough, however, to merely move the monkey. This monkey, I think, is the one which has "seen no evil" and "heard no evil." We've got to uncover its eyes and unplug its ears so that our conscience can "see" the cause and hear its cry.

THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

INCORPORATED

Belmont, Massachusetts 02178

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL OFFICE

2711 McKinney Avenue, Suite B

Dallas, Texas 75204

August 5, 1966

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Fr. Sherrill Smith
211 Nolan Street
San Antonio, Texas
78202

Dear sir:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of August 3. In response to your first statement as to being in doubt as to whether to laugh or cry -- you went on for ten pages of crying so I assume you reached a decision.

First, let me state that even though we have a divergence of thinking, let us both be thankful that we live in a land where we can have this difference of thinking and can express it openly.

Your letter praises "democracy". Of course, one of the most outstanding examples of democracy was 2000 years ago when Pilate asked the public what he should do with the prisoner -- they voted and the majority shouted, "Crucify Him, crucify Him". Not only were the rights of the minority destroyed, but they crucified The Christ. Another great example comes from the Old Testament in which 11 brothers voted to sell one brother into slavery. In fact, they didn't even allow Joseph to vote, but if he had, it would have been an 11 - 1 majority for slavery. And yet you praise "comradeship", "liberalism" and democracy". This is as great a contrast as it is to find people who are supposedly men and women of God participating in a demonstration or march. I can only recall one march that our Saviour took -- and that was to Golgatha. The significant difference is that He sacrificed Himself.

You quote from "one observer" who praises Cesar Chavez. I would be most interested in learning who this one observer is.

You state that the NFWA has done this with no help from the government. I beg to differ with you. "For instance, the other Caesar, the one in Washington, has granted the revolutionary

Fr. Sherrill Smith
August 5, 1966

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NFWA \$278,000 from the War on Poverty Program, though the funds have been delayed because some local Victorians objected to tax money being used to recruit "union" members and to encourage revolution." (American Opinion, June, 1966, page 4.) Meanwhile, Cesar is forced to subsist on the meager donations of the National Council of Churches, The Roman Catholic Charities and The Communist Party U.S.A.

Your comments pertaining to our creating understanding and harmony are based upon total ignorance of what was said. I think you are aware that we are not promoting injustice but we are saying that there is a Christian way in which these problems can be solved and this is not done by creating strife and hatred -- but rather with love.

Your admission that this is a "revolucion" and your comment of Communist support and financial aid of "so what?" is appalling. Jesus said bitter and sweet water does not come from the same fountain. Therefore, it is somewhat confusing to find people talking out of both sides of their mouths.

You stated, "I watched one valley priest cry crocodile tears as he listed the hardships the farmers have to endure". I also watched one Valley priest cry at the things that were being done in the name of the Church.

Pertaining to the Communist support, you say, "Though they (Communist) cry it the louder and in perfect unison with us, it is not about to silence our shout...". It certainly would appear that crying together and in unison plus financial support does not indicate that they were attempting to silence your shout.

I am shocked at your statement that in case after case when the Communist Conspiracy cooperated with and supported a movement it was to the advantage of the movement. Please name one -- that was a righteous and good movement.

You mentioned that we want to save a system "that requires a surplus of bodies and sweat to deliver food to our tables." We find no quarrel with the American system of government -- a

Fr. Sherril Smith
August 5, 1966

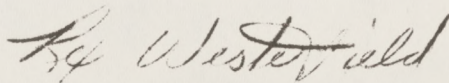
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free republic, we find no quarrel with the free enterprise system -- we do strongly oppose socialism, Communism, tyranny, terror, violence and slavery whether it be by government or by a collective group of people fighting for their "rights". You state that "revolucion" is a foreign word but not essentially different from the things shouted by our early founding fathers. Surely you can see that the revolution by our founding fathers was against tyranny and for freedom, in particular, the freedom of religion. This is in marked contrast to the "revolucion" of today which is revolting against the American Constitution and principles. In fact, most loyal Americans find it revolting -- period.

The entire tone of your letter is defensive. You are defending the Communist support and participation and screaming accusations at anyone who would dare criticize --- this defense is incredible.

You charge me with being stubborn, ignorant, etc. but no where in your 10 page letter did you find it in your heart to place me in your prayers -- may I assure you that you and the farm workers and the growers are in mine.

Sincerely,



Rex Westerfield
Regional Manager - Public Relations

RWlk

cc: ✓ NFWA, Rio Grande City, Texas
NFWA, Delano, Calif.
Associated Press, Harlingen
Alamo Messenger, San Antonio
Bishops' Committee for the Spanish Speaking
Social Action Department, NCWC
Texas AFL-CIO

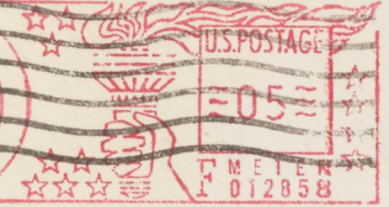
Since Fr. Smith's letter was sent to the news media, he apparently wishes to discuss it openly. Therefore, we are answering it openly.

THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

Suite B

2711 McKinney Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75204

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National Farm Workers Association

Rio Grande City,

Texas